



State of Wisconsin

Department of Health and Family Services

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For Immediate Release

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First Bird, Horse Test Positive for West Nile Virus

State and county health officials today announce that one bird in Eau Claire County and one horse in Chippewa County have tested positive for West Nile virus. These are the first animals to test positive for the virus in Wisconsin this year. Although very few mosquitoes actually carry the virus, birds and other animals can act as an early warning system for West Nile virus since they indicate the virus is present in the area. When positive animals are identified, people need to be more vigilant in their personal protective measures to prevent mosquito bites.

West Nile virus is spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito and people *must* be bitten by a WNV infected mosquito in order to contract the virus. Mosquitoes become infected with West Nile virus by feeding on infected birds, then potentially transmit the virus by biting other animals or people.

Statewide surveillance activities for West Nile virus began on May 1st. People who find a dead bird in their yard or who have a question about a dead bird should call the Dead Bird Reporting Hotline at 1-800-433-1610. Horse owners should contact their veterinarian if they suspect that their horse is ill with West Nile virus infection.

Below are some measures to help decrease your exposure to mosquitoes and prevent West Nile virus infection:

- Limit time spent outside at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Apply insect repellent to clothing as well as exposed skin since mosquitoes may bite through clothing.
- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair to prevent mosquito entry.
- Properly dispose of items that hold water such as tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots, or discarded tires.
- Clean roof gutters and downspouts for proper drainage.
- Turn over wheelbarrows, wading pools, boats, and canoes when not in use.
- Change the water in birdbaths and pet dishes at least every three days.
- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools, outdoor saunas, and hot tubs; drain water from pool covers.
- Trim tall grass, weeds, and vines since mosquitoes use these areas to rest during hot daylight hours.
- Landscape to prevent water from pooling in low-lying areas.

The chances of a person becoming infected with the West Nile virus are very low and most infected people will not have any symptoms. Those who do become ill typically develop a fever, headache, and rash that lasts a few days. Symptoms may begin between three to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

Children, older adults and people with compromised immune systems are at an increased risk of severe disease from the virus. There is no specific treatment for West Nile virus other than to treat symptoms. If you think you have a West Nile virus infection, contact your healthcare provider.

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The Department of Health and Family Services has monitored the spread of this virus since 2001. The surveillance program monitors wild birds, horses, mosquitoes, and humans for West Nile virus. In 2002, the state documented its first human infections with 52 human cases. This was followed by 17 human cases in 2003, 12 in 2004, 17 in 2005, and 21 in 2006 and 12 in 2007.

For more information on West Nile virus, go to <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/westNilevirus/>

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